

# What is the Monkeysphere?

By David Wong

*"One death is a tragedy. One million deaths is a statistic."*

*-Kevin Federline*

What do monkeys have to do with war, oppression, crime, racism and even e-mail spam? You'll see that all of the random ass-headed cruelty of the world will suddenly make perfect sense once we go Inside the Monkeysphere.

## "What the Hell is the Monkeysphere?"

First, picture a monkey. A monkey dressed like a little pirate, if that helps you. We'll call him Slappy.

Imagine you have Slappy as a pet. Imagine a personality for him. Maybe you and he have little pirate monkey adventures and maybe even join up to fight crime. Think how sad you'd be if Slappy died.

Now, imagine you get four more monkeys. We'll call them Tito, Bubbles, Marcel and ShitTosser. Imagine personalities for each of them now. Maybe one is aggressive, one is affectionate, one is quiet, the other just throws shit all the time. But they're all your personal monkey friends.

Now imagine a hundred monkeys.

Not so easy now, is it? So how many monkeys would you have to own before you couldn't remember their names? At what point, in your mind, do your beloved pets become just a faceless sea of monkey? Even though each one is every bit the monkey Slappy was, there's a certain point where you will no longer really care if one of them dies.

So how many monkeys would it take before you stopped caring?

That's not a rhetorical question. We actually know the number.

## "So this whole thing is your crusade against monkey overpopulation? I'll have my monkey castrated this very day!"

Uh, no. It'll become clear in a moment.

You see, monkey experts performed a monkey study a while back, and discovered that the size of the monkey's monkey brain determined the size of the monkey groups the monkeys formed. The bigger the brain, the bigger the little societies they built.

They cut up so many monkey brains, in fact, that they found they could actually take a brain they had never seen before and from it they could accurately predict what size tribes that species of creature formed.

Most monkeys operate in troupes of 50 or so. But somebody slipped them a slightly larger brain and they estimated the ideal group or society for this particular animal was about 150.

That brain, of course, was human. Probably from a homeless man they snatched off the streets.

"So that's the big news? That humans are God's big-budget sequel to the monkey? Who didn't know that?"

It goes much, much deeper than that. Let's try an example.

Famous news talking guy Tim Russert tells a charming story about his father, in his book *Big Russ and Me* (the title referring to his on-and-off romance with actor Russell Crowe). Russert's dad used to take half an hour to carefully box up any broken glass before taking it to the trash. Why? Because "The trash guy might cut his hands."

That this was such an unusual thing to do illustrates my monkey point. None of us spend much time worrying about the garbage man's welfare even though he performs a crucial role in not forcing us to live in a cave carved from a mountain of our own filth. We don't usually consider his safety or comfort at all and if we do, it's not in the same way we would worry over our best friend or wife or girlfriend or even our dog.

People toss half-full bottles of drain cleaner right into the barrel, without a second thought of what would happen if the trash man got it splattered into his eyes. Why? Because the trash guy exists outside the Monkeysphere.

"There's that word again..."

The Monkeysphere is the group of people who each of us, using our monkeyish brains, are able to conceptualize as people. If the monkey scientists are monkey right, it's physically impossible for this to be a number much larger than 150.

Most of us do not have room in our Monkeysphere for our friendly neighborhood sanitation worker. So, we don't think of him as a person. We think of him as The Thing That Makes The Trash Go Away.

And even if you happen to know and like your particular garbage man, at one point or another we all have limits to our sphere of monkey concern. It's the way our brains are built. We each have a certain circle of people who we think of as people, usually our own friends and family and neighbors, and then maybe some classmates or coworkers or church or suicide cult.

Those who exist outside that core group of a few dozen people are not people to us. They're sort of one-dimensional bit characters.

Remember the first time, as a kid, you met one of your school teachers outside the classroom? Maybe you saw old Miss Puckerson at Taco Bell eating refried beans through a straw, or saw your principal walking out of a dildo shop. Do you remember that surreal feeling you had when you saw these people actually had lives outside the classroom?

I mean, they're not people. They're teachers.

"So? What difference does all this make?"

Oh, not much. It's just the one single reason society doesn't work.

It's like this: which would upset you more, your best friend dying, or a dozen kids across town getting killed because their bus collided with a truck hauling killer bees? Which would hit you harder, your Mom dying, or seeing on the news that 15,000 people died in an earthquake in Iran?

They're all humans and they are all equally dead. But the closer to our Monkeysphere they are, the more it means to us. Just as your death won't mean anything to the Chinese or, for that matter, hardly anyone else more than 100 feet or so from where you're sitting right now.

### "Why should I feel bad for them? I don't even know those people!"

Exactly. This is so ingrained that to even suggest you should feel their deaths as deeply as that of your best friend sounds a little ridiculous. We are hard-wired to have a drastic double standard for the people inside our Monkeysphere versus the 99.999% of the world's population who are on the outside.

Think about this the next time you get really pissed off in traffic, when you start throwing finger gestures and wedging your head out of the window to scream, "LEARN TO FUCKING DRIVE, FUCKER!!" Try to imagine acting like that in a smaller group. Like if you're standing in an elevator with two friends and a coworker, and the friend goes to hit a button and accidentally punches the wrong one. Would you lean over, your mouth two inches from her ear, and scream "LEARN TO OPERATE THE FUCKING ELEVATOR BUTTONS, SHITCAMEL!!"

They'd think you'd gone insane. We all go a little insane, though, when we get in a group larger than the Monkeysphere. That's why you get that weird feeling of anonymous invincibility when you're sitting in a large crowd, screaming curses at a football player you'd never dare say to his face.

### "Well, I'm nice to strangers. Have you considered that maybe you're just an asshole?"

Sure, you probably don't go out of your way to be mean to strangers. You don't go out of your way to be mean to stray dogs, either.

The problem is that eventually, the needs of you or those within your Monkeysphere will require screwing someone outside it (even if that need is just venting some tension and anger via exaggerated insults). This is why most of us wouldn't dream of stealing money from the pocket of the old lady next door, but don't mind stealing cable, adding a shady exemption on our tax return, or quietly celebrating when they forget to charge us for something at the restaurant.

You may have a list of rationalizations long enough to circle the Earth, but the truth is that in our monkey brains the old woman next door is a human being while the cable company is a big, cold, faceless machine. That the company is, in reality, nothing but a group of people every bit as human as the old lady, or that some kind old ladies actually work there and would lose their jobs if enough cable were stolen, rarely occurs to us.

That's one of the ingenious things about the big-time religions, by the way. The old religious writers knew it was easier to put the screws to a stranger, so they taught us to get a personal idea of a God in our heads who says, "No matter who you hurt, you're really hurting me. Also, I can crush you like a grape." You must admit that if they weren't writing words inspired by the Almighty, they at least understood the Monkeysphere.

It's everywhere. Once you grasp the concept, you can see examples all around you. You'll walk the streets in a daze, like Roddy Piper after putting on his X-ray sunglasses in They Live.

But wait, because this gets much bigger and much, much stranger...

"So you're going to tell us that this Monkeysphere thing runs the whole world? Also, They Live sucked."

Go flip on the radio. Listen to the conservative talk about "The Government" as if it were some huge, lurking dragon ready to eat you and your paycheck whole. Never mind that the government is made up of people and that all of that money they take goes into the pockets of human beings. Talk radio's Rush Limbaugh is known to tip 50% at restaurants, but flies into a broadcast tirade if even half that dollar amount is deducted from his paycheck by "The Government." That's despite the fact that the money helps that very same single mom he had no problem tipping in her capacity as a waitress.

Now click over to a liberal show now, listen to them describe "Multinational Corporations" in the same diabolical terms, an evil black force that belches smoke and poisons water and enslaves humanity. Isn't it strange how, say, a lone man who carves and sells children's toys in his basement is a sweetheart who just loves bringing joy at Christmas, but a big-time toy corporation (which brings toys to millions of kids at Christmas) is an inhuman soul-grinding greed machine? Strangely enough, if the kindly lone toy making guy made enough toys and hired enough people and expanded to enough shops, we'd eventually stop seeing it as a toy-making shop and start seeing it as the fiery Orc factories of Mordor.

And if you've just thought, "Well, those talk show hosts are just a bunch of egomaniacal blowhards anyway," you've just done it again, turned real humans into two-word cartoon characters. It's no surprise, you do it with pretty much all six billion human beings outside the Monkeysphere.

"So I'm supposed to suddenly start worrying about six billion strangers? That's not even possible!" That's right, it isn't possible. That's the point.

What is hard to understand is that it's also impossible for them to care about you.

That's why they don't mind stealing your stereo or vandalizing your house or cutting your wages or raising your taxes or bombing your office building or choking your computer with spam advertising diet and penis drugs they know don't work. You're outside their Monkeysphere. In their mind, you're just a vague shape with a pocket full of money for the taking.

Think of Osama Bin Laden. Did you just picture a camouflaged man hiding in a cave, drawing up suicide missions? Or are you thinking of a man who gets hungry and has a favorite food and who had a childhood crush on a girl and who has athlete's foot and chronic headaches and wakes up in the morning with a boner and loves volleyball?

Something in you, just now, probably was offended by that. You think there's an effort to build sympathy for the murderous fuck. Isn't it strange how simply knowing random human facts about him immediately tugs at your sympathy strings? He comes closer to your Monkeysphere, he takes on dimension.

Now, the cold truth is this Bin Laden is just as desperately in need of a bullet to the skull as the raving four-color caricature on some redneck's T-shirt. The key to understanding people like him, though, is realizing that we are the caricature on his T-shirt.

"So you're using monkeys to claim that we're all a bunch of Osama Bin Ladens?"  
Sort of.

Listen to any 16 year-old kid with his first job, going on and on about how the boss is screwing him and the government is screwing him even more ("What's FICA?!?!" he screams as he looks at his first paycheck).

Then watch that same kid at work, as he drops a hamburger patty on the floor, picks it up, and slaps in on a bun and serves it to a customer.

In that one dropped burger he has everything he needs to understand those black-hearted politicians and corporate bosses. They see him in the exact same way he sees the customers lined up at the burger counter. Which is, just barely.

In both cases, for the guy making the burger and the guy running Exxon, getting through the workweek and collecting the paycheck are all that matters. No thought is given to the real human unhappiness being spread by doing it shittily (ever gotten so sick from food poisoning you thought your stomach lining was going to fly out of your mouth?) That many customers or employees just can't fit inside the Monkeysphere.

The kid will protest that he shouldn't have to care for the customers for minimum wage, but the truth is if a man doesn't feel sympathy for his fellow man at \$6.00 an hour, he won't feel anything more at \$600,000 a year.

Or, to look at it the other way, if we're allowed to be indifferent and even resentful to the masses for \$6.00 an hour, just think of how angry the some Pakistani man is allowed to be when he's making the equivalent of six dollars a week.

**"You've used the word 'monkey' more than 50 times, but the same principle hardly applies. Humans have been to the moon. Let's see the monkeys do that."**

It doesn't matter. It's just an issue of degree.

There's a reason why legendary monkeytician Charles Darwin and his assistant, Jeje (pronounced "heyhey") Santiago deduced that humans and chimps were evolutionary cousins. As sophisticated as we are (compare our advanced sewage treatment plants to the chimps' primitive technique of hurling the feces with their bare hands), the inescapable truth is we are just as limited by our mental hardware.

The primary difference is that monkeys are happy to stay in small groups and rarely interact with others outside their monkey gang. This is why they rarely go to war, though when they do it is widely thought to be hilarious. Humans, however, require cars and oil and quality manufactured goods by the fine folks at 3M and Japanese video games and worldwide internets and, most importantly, governments. All of these things take groups larger than 150 people to maintain effectively. Thus, we routinely find ourselves functioning in bunches larger than our primate brains are able to cope with.

This is where the problems begin. Like a fragile naked human pyramid, we are simultaneously supporting and resenting each other. We bitch out loud about our soul-sucking job as an anonymous face on an assembly line, while at the exact same time riding in a car that only an assembly line could have produced. It's a constant contradiction that has left us pissed off and joining informal wrestling clubs in basements.

This is why I think it was with a great burden of sadness that Darwin turned to his assistant and lamented, "Jeje, we're the monkeys."

"Oh, no you didn't."

If you think about it, our entire society has evolved around the limitations of the Monkeysphere. There is a reason why all of the really phat-ass nations with the biggest SUV's with the shiniest 22-inch rims all have some kind of representative democracy (where you vote for people to do the governing for you) and all of them are, to some degree, capitalist (where people actually get to buy property and keep some of what they earn).

A representative democracy allows a small group of people to make all of the decisions, while letting us common people feel like we're doing something by going to a polling place every couple of years and pulling a lever that, in reality, has about the same effect as the darkness knob on your toaster. We can simultaneously feel like we're in charge while being contained enough that we can't cause any real monkey mayhem once we fly into one of our screeching, arm-flapping monkey frenzies ("A woman showed her boob at the Super Bowl! We want a boob and football ban immediately!")

Conversely, some people in the distant past naively thought they could sit all of the millions of monkeys down and say, "Okay, everybody go pick the bananas, then bring them here, and we'll distribute them with a complex formula determining banana need! Now go gather bananas for the good of society!" For the monkeys it was a confused, comical, tree-humping disaster.

Later, a far more realistic man sat the monkeys down and said, "You want bananas? Each of you go get your own. I'm taking a nap." That man, of course, was German philosopher Hans Capitalism.

As long as everybody gets their own bananas and shares with the few in their Monkeysphere, the system will thrive even though nobody is even trying to make the system thrive. This is perhaps how Ayn Rand would have put it, had she not been such a hateful bitch.

Then, some time in the Third Century, French philosopher Pierre "Frenchy" LaFrench invented racism.

This was a way of simplifying the too-complex-for-monkeys world by imagining all people of a certain race as being the same person, thinking they all have the same attitudes and mannerisms and tastes in food and clothes and music. It sort of works, as long as we think of that person as being a good person ("Those Asians are so hard-working and precise and well-mannered!") but when we start seeing them as being one, giant, gaping asshole (the French, ironically) our monkey happiness again breaks down.

It's not all the French's fault. The truth is, all of these monkey management schemes only go so far. For instance, today one in four Americans has some kind of mental illness, usually depression. One in four. Watch a basketball game. The odds are at least two of those people on the floor are mentally ill. Look around your house; if everybody else there seems okay, it's you.

Is it any surprise? You turn on the news and see a whole special on the Obesity Epidemic. You've had this worry laid on your shoulders about millions of other people eating too much. What exactly are you supposed to do about the eating habits of 80 million people you don't even know? You've taken on the pork-laden burden of all these people outside the Monkeysphere and you now carry that useless weight of worry like, you know, some kind of animal on your back.

## "So what exactly are we supposed to do about all this?"

First, train yourself to get suspicious every time you see simplicity. Any claim that the root of a problem is simple should be treated the same as a claim that the root of a problem is Bigfoot. Simplicity and Bigfoot are found in the real world with about the same frequency.

So reject binary thinking of "good vs. bad" or "us vs. them." Know problems cannot be solved with clever slogans and over-simplified step-by-step programs.

You can do that by following these simple steps. We like to call this plan the T.R.Y. plan:

First, TOTAL MORON. That is, accept the fact THAT YOU ARE ONE. We all are.

That really annoying person you know, the one who's always spouting bullshit, the person who always thinks they're right? Well, the odds are that for somebody else, you're that person. So take the amount you think you know, reduce it by 99.999%, and then you'll have an idea of how much you actually know regarding things outside your Monkeysphere.

Second, UNDERSTAND that there are no Supermonkeys. Just monkeys. Those guys on TV you see, giving the inspirational seminars, teaching you how to reach your potential and become rich and successful like them? You know how they made their money? By giving seminars. For the most part, the only thing they do well is convince others they do everything well.

No, the universal moron principal established in No. 1 above applies here, too. Don't pretend politicians are somehow supposed to be immune to all the backhanded fuckery we all do in our daily lives and don't laugh and point when the preacher gets caught on video snorting cocaine off a prostitute's ass. A good exercise is to picture your hero--whoever it is--passed out on his lawn, naked from the waist down. The odds are it's happened at some point. Even Gandhi may have had hotel rooms and dead hookers in his past.

And don't even think about ignoring advice from a moral teacher just because the source enjoys the ol' Colombian Nose Candy from time to time. We're all members of varying species of hypocrite (or did you tell them at the job interview that you once called in sick to spend a day leveling up on World of Warcraft?) Don't use your heroes' vices as an excuse to let yours run wild.

And finally, DON'T LET ANYBODY simplify it for you. The world cannot be made simple. Anyone who tries to paint a picture of the world in basic comic book colors is most likely trying to use you as a pawn.

So just remember: T-R-Y. Go forth and do likewise, gents. Copies of our book are available in the lobby.